DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 926 CS 503 128

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TITLE Metacommunicative Development.
PUB DATE Nov 80
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (66th, New York, NY, November 13-16, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Communication Research; *Communication Skills; *Language Processing; Learning Processes; Literature Reviews; *Metacognition
IDENTIFIERS *Metalinguistics

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this analytical essay is to lay out some conceptual boundaries and distinctions about how children develop and use metacommunication (messages whose primary function is to make reference to or transform themselves or other messages). Two types of metacommunication are discussed: metalinguistic messages, in which there is a temporary shift in awareness from message content to some aspect of the language used to code that content; and framing, which means transforming one kind of event into another kind of event by logical typing. These two domains of metacommunication are analyzed by using examples from the research literature to provide insights about how children develop metacommunicative skills. The discussion of metalinguistic skills focuses on the predictable development of these skills in preoperational and concrete operational children, noting that the transition from the tendency to centrate in the preoperational stage to decentrate in the concrete operational stage is reflected in metalinguistic performance. The discussion of metacommunicative framing skills revolves around the communicative transformation of one kind of event into a related event through levels of abstraction, and delineates seven types of framing, including quoting, procedural, play, humor, deception, argument, and relationship (symmetry and alternation). (RL)

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Metacommunicative Development

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Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Annual Convention, New York City, November 1980.

CS503128

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As children learn language and pragmatics, they also learn metacommunication. Researchers have long understood this to be true in some way, but the understanding of terms such as metalinguistics and metacommunication has been so murky and primitive that assessing its development has seemed impractical. The purpose of the present essay is to lay out some conceptual boundaries and distinctions about metacommunication that might be useful in studying how children develop and use it.

We argue that research to date particularly supports examination of two aspects of metacommunication which we call metalinguistics and framing. This paper describes these two domains and provides some examples from the literature which give some beginning insights into understanding how children develop each of these sets of skills.

Metacommunication

The term metacommunication is commonly understood as "communication about communication," and its use frequently carries a connotation of describing nonverbal behavior. Before using the term here, several qualifications must be introduced, since the terms metacommunication and metalinguistics have been employed many different ways in the past three decades. We begin with a synthesized review of some uses of the prefix "meta."

The Prefix "Meta"

"Meta" means about, but it also is listed in Random House and Webster's dictionaries as denoting beyond, along with, beside, modifying, and changed in form. Each of these semi-synonymous terms picks up some thread of the meta-tapestry. Meta- is a good process term; it never stands still for analysis. Meta- is the term scholars use to explain that nearly every message is more than it seems to be. A vivid message, like a successful small group, is more than the sum of its parts. Part of the plus-factor is meta-communication.

Some accounts of metacommunication emphasize the importance of nonverbal message elements (Birdwhistell, 1970), but much meta-communication is verbal (e.g., "I asked you to say please."). Some metacommunication seems difficult to trace to any signal or symbolic properties of messages--it seems almost taken-for-granted (e.g., interpreting a remark as a joke even though it is delivered deadpan).

Since metacommunication is sometimes nonverbal, sometimes verbal, and sometimes taken-for-granted, one must be somewhat abstract in defining it. Here is our attempt: messages that serve a primary function of making reference to or transforming themselves or other messages constitute metacommunication. To explicate this somewhat cryptic definition, we review here two kinds of communicative phenomena that show metacommunicative properties. The first type are metalinguistic messages. These are messages in which there is a temporary shift in awareness from message content to some aspect of the language used to code that content. The aspect of language focused upon may be either its meaning, the linguistic form used to

convey that meaning, or both. Framing is the skill of transforming one kind of event into another kind of event by logical typing. Examples include play and deception. Each of these aspects of metacommunication is described below, first in terms of conceptual definition, then in terms of examples from research in child development.

Metalinguistic Metacommunication

In most ongoing discourse, language serves as a vehicle for the transmission of thought. Messages acquire metalinguistic character when some aspect of the language itself becomes instead the object or focus of thought. Normally, both listeners and speakers are attuned to the meaning of a message. Neither particularly notices specific linguistic elements until something unexpected occurs. For example, a particular word may be temporarily focused upon because it was incorrectly produced or because a punster has played with its meaning. In either case, when this occurs, there is a temporary shift in focus from what is being said to certain aspects of the language used to say it.

Metalinguistic skills involve a two step process. Initially, all metalinguistic tasks involve focusing on linguistic form--that is, some linguistic entity is isolated as a target of focal awareness. In some cases, the linguistic element does not have to be disembedded but is simply provided, as when a child is presented with a word and asked to segment it into syllables. Once the element is either disembedded or provided, some kind of mental manipulation is performed on that element. It is at this second

stage that metalinguistic tasks differ. Some require reflection upon the meaning component of the disembedded element while others require some type of manipulation of the linguistic form. Still other tasks appear to require a manipulation of both form and meaning. The development of metalinguistic skills can be considered in light of these different kinds of task demands and the response strategies children bring to each task.

Children's performance on metalinguistic skills reflects their cognitive reasoning abilities at different points in development (see Van Kleeck, 1980a, and in press for further discussion of this point). Indirect support for this claim is available in the existing literature, if one makes the assumption that children up to the age of six or seven are in Piaget's preoperational stage of cognitive development and those beyond that are in the concrete operational stage.

According to Piagetian theory, a major characteristic of preoperational children's thought is centration. Centration refers to the child's tendency to concentrate or center on one aspect of a situation at a time. Metalinguistic performance in the preoperational stage directly reflects the tendency to centrate. Generally, preoperational children focus on the meaning of messages, and even here are limited to considering only one meaning. Occassionally, they may focus exclusively on linguistic form. The point is, the child at this point in development cannot consider both form and meaning or even two meanings simultaneously. In such situations, the child tends to interpret meaning in a narrowly semantic way.

The semantic bias of the preoperational child is reflected by inaccurate performance on two tasks which require form and not meaning manipulations. On word-referent differentiation tasks, the preoperational child will offer a word such as "train" when asked to provide a long word (Berthoud-Papandropoulou, 1978). Clearly, the word's meaning and not its linguistic form has been the child's focus on this task. This focus on meaning is again evidenced when children are asked to judge the grammaticality of a sentence. One child in a study by Gleitman and her colleagues (Gleitman, Gleitman & Shipley, 1972) stated that the sentence "I am eating dinner" was not acceptable. The child then explained that he didn't like to eat dinner. The suburbanite children in this study also negated the grammatical accuracy of "The men wait for the bus" on the grounds that only children wait for buses.

Because they can focus on only one meaning at a time, preoperational children also fail to appreciate linguistic ambiguity that often occurs in humor. In a similar manner, they demonstrate awareness of only the physical meaning of dual-function adjectives such as "sweet" or "hard" (Asch & Nerlove, 1960). Preoperational children do focus on form in isolation when they engage in sound play (e.g., Weir, 1962) or when asked to segment words into syllables (Fox & routh, 1975; Liberman, Shankweiler, Fischer, & Carter, 1974) or sentences into words (Fox & Routh, 1975).

The limitation of the preoperational child's thought, in terms of the tendency to centrate, is overcome with the transition to the concrete operational stage which takes place at approximately six or seven years of age. The concrete operational child can decentrate, that is, hold in mind and relate more than one aspect of

a situation at a time. Because of this ability, the concrete operational child can simultaneously think about language in two ways. It can be both a medium for conveying thought and an object for inspection in its own right.

The concrete operational child (aged approximately 6 to 11 years) can as such focus on the form of language while simultaneously retaining its meaning. This allows accurate performance on word-referent tasks and on grammaticality judgments. Two meanings can also be held in mind and related. The concrete operational child begins to show evidence of appreciating linguistic ambiguity humor (Fowles & Glanz, 1977; Hirsh-Pasek, Gleitman, & Gleitman, 1978) and both meanings of dual function adjectives (Asch & Nerlove, 1960). They cannot yet, however, deal well with figurative language, in which the extended meaning is not conventional but newly created by being used in different domains (Winner, Rosential, & Gardner, 1976). Skill in comprehending metaphor awaits the onset of Piaget's formal operational stage, beginning at approximately eleven years of age.

Metalinguistic skills which have more complex task demands such as those requiring simultaneous form and meaning manipulations take a correspondingly longer time for the child to master. For example, in the case of certain types of linguistic ambiguity such as morpheme boundary ambiguity, both form and semantic content must be manipulated for resolution. Consider the following riddle:

Question: Why is the man in the fish market stingy?

Answer: Because his job makes him sell fish.

The resolution involves manipulation of form by moving the morpheme boundary and combining the two words "sell fish" to the meaning of

"selfish." Children do not begin to appreciate this morpheme boundary humor until around the sixth grade or twelve years of age.

In summary, the metalinguistic skills of the preoperational and concrete operational child appear to have certain predictable characteristics which can be attributed to the more general reasoning skills they bring to these tasks. Most notably, the transition from the tendency to centrate in the preoperational stage to the ability to decentrate in the concrete operational stage is reflected in metalinguistic performance. With the emergence of this ability to consider more than one aspect of a situation at a time, concrete operational children can likewise consider, relate, and manipulate more than one aspect of the linguistic code simultaneously.

Framing: Transformation Through Levels of Abstraction

Metacommunication research probably began when Gregory Bateson (1954) observed that zoo animals frequently engage in play behavior that is seemingly modeled on combat. In fact this species of behavior appears to be mock-play combat. The human observer cannot tell immediately which acts are playful and which are warlike, but the animals rarely appear confused about this distinction. Bateson asks in this context, what is the nature of the message "this is play?" The animals must share some form of this message in order for them to coordinate playful behavior and know that they are not really fighting. But where is the message? It is somewhere in "meta"--along with and yet within the message. The message "this is play" also involves some change, or

transformation from one frame, or interpretative scheme, to another. The message "this is play" somehow transforms combat acts into play acts. How is this possible when it appears that the message "this is play" is probably communicated by the way that acts of mock combat are performed? The characterizing message may be part of the message it characterizes, though that state of affairs violates both logic and common sense.

Bateson argues that a message such as "this is play" is conceptually problematic because it occupies a higher level of conceptual abstraction than do individual moves in the combat or mock-combat. The term "level of abstraction" springs from Russell's theory of description, and refers to the tenet of logic that a descriptive characterizer cannot be conceptualized as being part of the same set as those items it characterizes. As an example of this principle, consider the set of numbers 1, 2, and 3. Each of these numbers belongs to the set, but the conceptual entity that is the set itself cannot belong to the set. The characterizer of the set can serve as an operator-changer for members of the set but it cannot be part of it. Why is this a logical problem? Consider the message "this is play" which must be shared by animals in order to coordinate their interactions. This message is a characterizer, and individual moves in the mock-combat (say nips and growls) are members of the set characterized. The characterizer ("this is play") is of a different logical level than the nips and growls. Yet its meaning-function must emerge within the same space-time situation. The message "this is play"

must be signaled in some way within the set of messages it characterizes--that is impossible in terms of logic.

How does it happen? Bateson speculates that "this is play" emerges as a frame, or set of premises that characterize the event. To summarize, framing is a communicative transformation of one kind of event into a related event. Combat to play, praise to kidding or irony.

Goffman (1974) attempts to ground a set of analyses upon Bateson's notions of frame and transformation. Goffman notes numerous examples of frame-relevant communication in everyday affairs, including use of direct quotes, use of vocal intonations to indicate kidding, and many others. He uses the term key to refer to a qualifying message that signals the presence of a frame. Keys are messages about the frame in which a strip (group of messages) is to be taken. Keys perform transformations of one strip of events into related sets of events to which they bear structural similarity. For example, a sentence is transformed into a direct quote by the use of quotation marks. A statement may be transformed into an ironic tease by use of vocal intonation. A bite is somehow transformed from combat to play. In many cases, the keys may be difficult or even impossible to spot. They may not even be physically present (Hopper, in press).

The important part of this excursion into meta-as-transformation is that keys are within-yet-conceptually distinct from other message units. They act to characterize entire strips of interaction. Communicators do not usually have conscious understanding

of this interactive property. But children learn to do it--to treat messages as transformed-modified-framed by meta-messages.

It is possible to delineate several major types of frames. These include (1) quoting, (2) procedural, (3) play, (4) humor, (5) deception, (6) argument, and (7) relationship. Evidence called from the literature regarding the emergence of these various types of frames is discussed below.

Quoting. Bates describes the early stages of framing quoted language. Drawing from her data on two Italian children, Claudia (C) and Francesco (F), she discusses how children learn to explicitly refer to the speech act itself. To make this point, she uses several examples of quoting which show a developmental pattern.

Even prior to seeing examples of quoting in children's speech, a precursory form of quoting emerges in the context of adult-child discourse. In this case, the adult might ask, "How does a doggie go?", to which a child might respond, "Woof-woof." The earliest examples of quoting in Claudia's speech described the nonlinguistic sounds (often of animals) using the verb "to do" ("fare" in Italian) in order to quote the vocal performance. For example:

C1; 10: They were [doing] "cu-cu" (p. 135).

C1; 11: The calf's mommy goes "muh" (p. 138).

C2; 0; 22: The dog goes "bau-bau-bau." This one goes "beh-beh" (p. 138).

Claudia also became somewhat obsessed with what may or may not be said. In this context, embedded rather than direct quotes were noted, e.g.,

C2; 0; 22: One doesn't say "accipicchia" (p. 138).

C(between 2;4 and 2;6): Daddy said that one doesn't say "accipicchia" and one says "Look at that" (p. 139).

At around this same age, Claudia began using direct quotes for character lines from fairy tales, e.g.,

C2; 4; 10: Fulmine says "Can I come and sing too" (p. 139).

Francesco also began quoting by using the Italian verb "to do," but quickly moved to explicit verbs of saying. There was for some time a concern with permissable expression, but not to the extent witnessed in Claudia's data. Finally, Francesco also recounted fairy tales and used direct quoting of characters' lines.

Procedural Frames. Many utterances in a conversation add nothing new to the topic. Instead, they are procedural, serving the sole function of maintaining a communication channel between conversational participants. These utterances have been variously labelled as phatic (Bruner, 1975), housekeeping management moves (Weiner & Goodenough, 1977), conversational devices (Dore, 1977), and procedural moves (Weels & Ferrier, 1976). Procedural moves include devices for initiating, maintaining, and ending conversations. They also include mechanisms for repair when there is some kind of communication failure. Their meta-function is to signal messages such as "Let's have a conversation," "I'm still listening, keep going," and "Let's end our talking."

Messages can take on a different character and thus interpretation depending upon which part of a conversation they are framed in. For example, the utterance, "Let's plan to get together for lunch," will likely be treated as a sincere request if it occurs in the opening stages of a conversation. The participants will likely follow up with an attempt to find a mutually open date for having lunch together. However, when conversation closing has been framed, this same message will be interpreted more broadly as meaning something to the effect of "It's been nice chatting with you. We'll have to do it again sometime." Within a conversation many procedural devices signal meta-messages such as "I'm still listening and interested, keep going," "I didn't quite understand or hear you," or "It's your or my turn to talk now."

To date, research regarding the development of procedural moves has focused primarily on those devices aimed at maintaining the conversational flow. The means which young children use to fulfill conversational obligations were addressed by Corsaro (1977) and Donahue (1977). Children learn at a very early age that utterances such as "um-hmm," "yeah," etc. serve to fulfill their response obligation. Duncan (1972) referred to such procedural moves as back channel responses. Both Corsaro (1977) and Donahue (1977) independently noted that children most frequently provide such responses following adult questions (including any utterance with rising intonation contour). While adult questions often superficially appear to function as requests for information (and

a child's response may as such be considered to be providing requested information), Ervin-Tripp & Miller (1977) discuss how the "facade of information exchange is used for other purposes" (p. 15). Among these is maintaining discourse. Indeed, Corsaro suggests that adults employ question asking strategies mainly as a device for maintaining a conversation.

While questions explicitly require a response from a conversational partner, Keenan (1974) points out that even comments lead to an anticipation, and thus an implicit obligation, for response. An awareness of this less explicit conversational obligation emerges later than an awareness that questions require responses. However, even by age 2:9, Keenan's twin boys demonstrated remarkable proficiency regarding this particular conversational expectation. Out of 76 conversational turns in their dialogue containing comments, only three received no verbal acknowledgment. Van Kleeck (1980b) found that while three year old children more frequently responded to questions than to comments, they were more likely to offer additional information in their responses to comments. Thus it appears that question forms are more likely to elicit back-channel or purely procedural type responses from children.

An even later development in conversational turn taking involves self-selection as next speaker. This is often achieved through utterances which refer only indirectly to preceding discourse. Bates (1976) cites as an example of such an opening gambit the use of "Yes, but..." to introduce self as speaker (p. 122).

Less investigation has focused on children's ability to open and close conversations. In his study of preschool children, Corsaro (reported in Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1978) did note that children frequently employ both verbal and nonverbal strategies in order to initiate or gain entrance into play. Leave-taking on the other hand, is often unmarked, at least verbally. Children will simply walk away. The extent to which this pattern holds up for entering and leaving conversations remains to be determined.

The ability to make corrections in ongoing discourse has also been addressed from a developmental perspective. Gallagher (1977) demonstrated that even in the earliest stages of language acquisition, children were able to respond to a listener asking "what?" by either repeating or attempting to make revisions in their speech. Less is known about how children handle conversational violations such as interruptions, although Bates (1976) provides an example from her data on Italian children. At age 2;0;7, Claudia became quite concerned with being interrupted. In one conversation, she let this be known by saying, "Big talker," which is loosely translatable as "chatterbox" or "big mouth" (p. 138).

Play. Analogous to the zoo animals' ability to communicate the distinction between mock and real combat, young children often frame play to distinguish it from nonplay. As Garvey (1976) notes "the reality-play distinction appears to be essential to interpreting the partner's gesture in terms of its primary meaning or its non-literal

meaning. Both partners must recognize that the state of play obtains in order to interpret and correctly respond to the other's behaviour" (p. 576).

Garvey notes from her data on the social play of 3½ to 5½ year-old age-matched dyads that "often the state of play was explicitly bounded" (p. 576). In other words, the key (to use Goffman's term) was a linguistic message. Often the state of play was keyed by an utterance containing the word "pretend." Garvey gives the example, "Pretend you called me on the telephone" (p. 476). In other cases, the state of play was signalled by explicit role assignment, as in "I'll be the mommy and you be the daddy, O.K.?" (p. 576). During the play episode, the children in Garvey's study periodically tested to determine whether the play frame was still operating. As Garvey explains, testing the maintenance of the play orientation "appeared to be a relevant factor in the attitude or alignment taken, not only to objects, but to the behaviour of the partner, whose definition of the situation is critical to the continuing interchange" (p. 576-577).

Garvey found that endings for the play frame were reached by tacit mutual agreement or again by explicit utterances such as "I'm not playing anymore" (p. 576). The fact that the children were able to end an episode by tacit agreement indicates that these children were already managing transformations either via more subtle nonlinguistic messages or without any physically observable message at all.

That framing constitutes a very important part of play was dramatically illustrated in the study of a 5½ year-old boy Jamie (Martlew, Connelly, & McCleod, 1978). These investigators observed

the language accompanying Jamie's play in three contexts, (1) playing alone, (2) playing with a peer, and (3) playing with his mother. Although not labelled "framing" per se, these authors did note marked differences in Jamie's need to set the scene and elaborate the rules in these three different contexts.

When alone, Jamie's fantasy play consisted largely of dramatic dialogue. There were very few explicit frame markers (keys) or, in the authors' terms, there were few "ongoing accounts about the situation as a form of stage direction" (p. 94). Indeed, there was no need for scene-setting instructions in this situation since there was no one with whom to seek alignment. Jamie had total control over the frame; no negotiation was required. He could change the setting, etc., without having to give explanations, instructions, or scene setting descriptions.

In the peer play situation, maintaining the fantasy play frame required, as Garvey also noted, both mutual recognition and acceptance. This necessitated frequent story recapitulations and scene setting. Not only need the scene be set, but it must be done jointly. As such, the participants had to give more ongoing accounts and explanations of events leading up to a scene. Sometimes, agreement regarding the fantasy frame was not reached. In fact, play episodes were often terminated because one partner would not accept the prevailing "rules," as the following example illustrates:

Jamie. Look that coach comes along here you know.
Friend. No but--I know--but this car knows this, so robbers-
Jamie. No it's not.
Friend. No it says yes 'cos don't forget there's no coaches or buses travelling.
Jamie. There is.
Friend. There's not.
Jamie. I don't care the game doesn't have to be the same as anything.
Friend. Well it can be. Do it yourself.
Jamie. I'm not going to play with you then.
Friend. You're not to.
Jamie. All right then, shoo. Have all your stuff.

Very interestingly, Jamie's interactions with his mother were different from his peer play in the sense that elaborate fantasy play was lacking. In contrast to this play framing in peer conversation, adult-child play did not use the context and toys as a "springboard for fantasy" (p. 97). Rather, talk had more of a teacher/pupil quality. The context toys were used as teaching materials. Their properties were discussed and relationships explored.

Jamie's differentiated use of frames in varying social contexts underscores his understanding of their social function. He understood that transformations need to be explicitly encoded only in social interactions. Witness the lack of explicit keys in his solitary play. Furthermore, he realized that certain transformations were acceptable only with certain partners. Mothers will not enter the elaborate fantasy world one can share with peers.

Humor. Another frame mentioned by Goffman distinguishes between kidding or humor and seriously intended discourse. An interesting developmental trend regarding one such type of frame was noted by Sutton-Smith (1977). Although he did not use Goffman's terminology, Sutton-Smith in effect noted that in learning to tell riddles, children four or five years old give evidence of learning

the correct keys before they are aware of the exact nature of the frame content. That is, children at this age know the format for the riddle telling--that there is a question, an answer, and then laughter. They had not yet learned that a riddle required some expectancy violation in order to be considered a riddle. And so, as many parents are well aware, the child of this age is delighted at asking questions and giving literal or meaningless answers, and laughing profusely. Unknown to the child, the parents' laughter is often in response not to the child's riddle, but to the fact that the child has learned the frame but has not yet mastered the content of riddles.

Much older children, usually some time during adolescence, find it extremely amusing to consciously violate the expected riddle content. As such, absurd riddles such as the elephant genre become popular for this age group.

Deception. Deception is a frame which differs from others in that it is the speaker's hope that the frame is not detected. DeVilliers and deVilliers (1978) suggest that becoming a good liar requires several impressive communication skills. According to these authors, "the liar cannot be bound by circumstances or s/he would uncontrollably blurt out the truth. S/he must be aware of what information would best convince his listener, and even the style to adopt to convey it most effectively" (p. 164).

While the development of deception has not been the focus of a great deal of study, the deVilliers do suggest that there may be several "immature" or ineffective forms of lying before mastery is achieved. Even a two year old will change her or his story when

the adult's tone of voice indicates the she or he has done something punishable. The midstream change of stance clearly frames the utterance for the listener as an attempt at deception. The deVilliers also noted how older children will frame falsehoods by offering unsolicited information, as in running up to a parent and saying, for no apparent reason, "I didn't break the lamp." In the course of development, children eventually become sophisticated enough to not key their deception.

Argument. While an entire interaction may in fact take place in an argument framework, it is also possible to transform a friendly conversation into an argument and eventually back into a friendly or at least neutral conversation.

Brenneis and Lein (1977) observed the role-play arguments of first, third, and fourth graders in order to determine the structural rules and strategies children employ in argument discourse. They isolated four stylistic tactics used in dispute. In Goffman's terms, we might refer to these as paralinguistic keys. They were volume escalation, speed acceleration, stress emphasis, and intonation exaggeration. Also, within the argument, these authors found that the structure used at the beginning of an argument constrained the linguistic form of the rest of the argument sequence. In this way, the person who began the argument has the advantage of being able to control, albeit probabilistically, the course of the ensuing argument. For example, insults usually led either to an insult or a denial. Imperatives usually led only to denials. It is these formal devices, then, divorced from any particular

message content, that can in part determine the direction an argument will take.

Relationship framing. A number of writers have suggested that some metacommunication serves as a control mechanism for the management of human relationships. To the extent that this occurs, relational framing procedures must be learned and used. Ruesch and Bateson (1951) refer to report and command aspects of communication; Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) distinguish content and relationship communication. These distinctions refer to communicators being able to use utterances to characterize and influence the course of relationships along the dimensions of power (dominance/submission) and affect (love/hate). Indications that children are developing an ability to frame the relational aspects of a conversation would correspondingly fall along the continua of either of these dimensions.

Regarding the power dimension of relationship framing, expressions of dominance and submission such as giving commands and obeying, answering or refusing to answer questions, and use of pronouns of power and solidarity may each exhibit its unique developmental history. Alternatively, these items and others may cluster together within one developmental process. Regarding affect dimensions of relationships, one is struck by children's frequent explicit encoding of affect terms: "Be my best friend," "Give me your bear or you cannot come to my party," "I'll kill you" or "Kathy is my second-best friend."

There is little literature that explicitly addresses relational dimensions of communicative development, and our

speculations here are limited to the power/dominance aspect of relationship. Particularly, we note some developmental trends in two patterns somewhat universally useful for interpreting dominance and submission: Symmetry and Alternation. Symmetry involves the equal sharing of conversational resources; assymetry the unequal sharing. The general proposition most supported by the literature is that dominant messages lead to submissive messages from the other and that submission leads to dominance (assymmetry). Alternation refers to the use of particular forms to signal status, especially when those forms are used on some occasions and not on others. We discuss each of these briefly in terms of developmental literature.

Symmetry of usage patterns (or assymmetry) in a dyad often serve as strategic framing devices (keys) of power and dominance (Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, 1967). A number of investigators have noted that conversation in children's peer dyads is characterized by symmetry (Lougee, Grueneich & Hartup, 1977; Van Kleeck & Cooper, 1980). Since there are far more questions asked by the adult participants in adult-child dyadic communication, these conversations are characterized by assymetry (Van Kleeck, 1980b, Malzone & Parker, 1979).

In this context, it is interesting to examine the responses of a 5 1/2 year-old to adult and child questions (Martlew et al., 1978). The child, Jamie, showed evidence of contextual sensitivity to status in this regard. He answered his mother's questions straightforwardly and without difficulty, indicating that he was willing to allow this verbal control over the situation. He

asked his mother few questions. By contrast, in conversation with a peer, Jamie asked as many questions as the other child, and did not always choose to answer those asked by the other child.

Alternation involves the use of different syntactic forms to convey social meaning. The power dimension of relationships is often subtlety framed by the prosodic, phonologic, and/or syntactic forms a speaker chooses. The linguistic encoding of sex-role stereotypes provides a compelling example. The cultural stereotypes of the female as tending to be more powerless, lacking in conviction, and polite than the male each have their counterparts in the choice of language forms. Females are polite, therefore they don't swear. Their weakness might be conveyed in their use of trivializing adjectives. A lack of conviction is reflected in tag questions which seek confirmation of thought or feeling expressed. The male stereotype, on the other hand, suggests strength, confidence and conviction. Linguistically the male can express anger or meanness by using profanity. He can speak directly. Both a speaker's use of and a listener's interpretation of these language forms serves to frame the power position of the sexes in ongoing discourse (Lakoff, 1975).

The ability of 4 to 7 year-old children to alternate the content, style, and pronunciation of their language when role-playing a father versus a mother was demonstrated by Andersen (1977). When enacting the father's role, the propositional content of the children's talk centered on business oriented issues. The style of speech was straightforward, unqualified, and forceful. In

assuming the mother role, the propositional content revolved around issues of family care. The style was more talkative, polite, qualified, and softer. The pronunciation contained more baby-talk forms.

While the foregoing discussion has categorized the various types of frames as if they were mutually exclusive, it is important to note that frames may sometimes occur simultaneously. One clear example of this occurs in the context of role-playing. Here children are simultaneously operating within a fantasy frame and a quoting frame, since they are taking on the voices, mannerisms, etc. of the figure they are assuming. Bates (1976) provides a more subtle example of simultaneous framing. At age 2;0;22, Claudia states, "Lie. What are you saying, Mommy, lie. You're saying a lie" (p. 138). Here Claudia is exhibiting relationship framing, since to call someone a liar presupposes a certain status position enabling such an accusation. At the same time, Claudia is demonstrating an explicit judgment of her mother's deception frame. It may be the case that such simultaneous framing occurs frequently in ongoing discourse.

Conclusions

In many respects the development of metalinguistics and framing appear to have little in common. The apparent independence of the developmental processes involved in these two meta- domains is perhaps to a large extent an artifact of the type of data available for each. Metalinguistics has been the more intensely researched area. Data sources have involved instances of children's

spontaneous talk about some aspect of language as well as experimental studies in which children have been explicitly asked to think about and often to judge some aspect of language.

On the other hand, framing has rarely been conceived of as a metacommunicative skill in the developmental literature (but see Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1978). In our attempt to apply this notion to the development of metacommunication, we have culled evidence from a wide variety of sources. Indeed, there has been no direct attempt to study this phenomenon, at least not starting from a theoretical perspective of framing. As such, nearly all the data corresponds to the spontaneous talk data available regarding metalinguistic development. The one exception to this is one study which looked at children's judgments of one aspect of framing. This study suggests that very similar cognitive strategies may be operating in the development of both types of metacommunication discussed in this paper. This study, which addressed children's judgments of the alternation which occurs in female versus male talk, is discussed below and related to similar judgment studies regarding metalinguistics.

Edelsky (1977) studied developmental changes in judgments of sex attributes of linguistic features by first, third and sixth graders. The first graders were very much attuned to the meaning rather than the form of the sentences presented, although they did consistently attribute swearing to males. The extent to which this strategy was operating was evidenced when even nonsense sentences

were responded to on the basis of the message meaning. "The wik slupped my damn flip" was attributed to women by some children who explained that women "wik" more than men. Even though the first graders already demonstrated a stereotype that men swear, they were swayed by message content when the swearing form conflicted with it. Thus, "Damn it, get me that perfume" was attributed to women.

By the third grade, on items that adults agreed were unequivocally female, form and not message content was responded to in making the linguistic sex-role judgments. However, where adults had less agreement that a linguistic form typified femaleness (e.g., adverbs and tag questions), the third garders responded on the basis of message content or claimed the form was sexually neutral. It seems, then, that the strength of the cultural sex-typing influenced the developmental order in which children were capable of judging the sentences. The instability of the newly acquired linguistic form strategy was demonstrated by the following response given by one third grader.

Examiner: Who says "Won't you pretty please hand me the hammer?"
Child: The lady.
Examiner: Why?
Child: Cause of "pretty please."
Examiner: How about "Won't you pretty please hand me the baseball uniform?"
Child: Maybe a boy.
Examiner: Why?
Child: Cause of "baseball uniform."

By the sixth grade, form was consistently used in making sex-role judgments. In fact, the sixth graders response closely resembled those of the adults in Edelsky's study.

Children's strategies for sociolinguistic judgments regarding the correspondence of linguistic forms to sex-role typing in many ways parallels their metalinguistic judgments of linguistic form. In both cases, preoperational children (making the assumption that the first graders in Edelsky's study were still in the preoperational stage or just making the transition to concrete operations) were primarily focused on the meaning of messages and not the form used to convey that meaning. Later in development, children are able to perform parallel processing of semantics and form in both types of tasks.

Besides being able to judge sex-related alternation, the development of children's use of syntactic alternation in their own speech has been discussed by Bates (1976). Bates suggests that children become able to use various syntactic forms for the same communicative function by the age of 3½ to 4 years. It is only by age seven or eight, however, that children begin to demonstrate skill in simultaneously manipulating both syntactic form and message content to achieve communicative goals. At this point, they can persuade and deceive. Here again, we see a likely developmental difference in metacommunicative skill between preoperational and concrete operational children. The younger children normally process semantically, but may focus on form alone in certain circumstances. By contrast, concrete operational children can manipulate two aspects of the linguistic code simultaneously. The above examples of alternation represent receptive processing. Future researchers may profitably test the speculations here with production of such examples of alternation on terms of address and other expressions of power and deference.

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